

little red squalling things that the waz-ho-don promptly ate. Maybe there was some way that this could simply go on, adding yet another source of food for the adenen-yo.

It seemed to be going much harder this time, the pregnant female, the one Om-at was himself accustomed to using for sex, squatting red-faced, crying and rubbing at her bloody genitals, straining as if constipated. Om-at crouched down and looked. Right there, he could see the top of the infant's head, slowly pushing out. The female suddenly grabbed him, screamed and convulsed. The infant squirted out, plopping on the ground, letting out a thin, startled scream of its own, still attached to the mother by some kind of dark, kinked vine-like thing. Well, that was always there, part of the birthing process of mammals. He'd seen dead baby baboons with these vines still coming out of their bellies.

He grabbed it up before the female could reach for it, ignoring her pitiful cries, inspecting the thing. Very strange. Big-browed like a tor-o-don, domed head like a waz-ho-don. Big too. He parted the little legs. Male. Sniffed. Mostly, it smelled like tor-o-don blood, but there was just this little whiff of waz-ho-don aroma, not quite right, but...

He handed it back to the female, who clutched it to her breast, looking at him wide-eyed. Om-at turned and glanced at Ta-den, who'd been watching closely. "Baby," he said.

Ta-den nodded slowly. "Baby," he agreed. But there was doubt in his voice.

It was almost dark when the attack came, stars already visible, dark purple sky striated by orange and black clouds.

Om-at had been very nervous lately. They tried hard to stay away from O-lo-a's people, going way up the valley, avoiding the old camps. But the tor-o-don were clustered there now and they had to stay away from them as well. Though the females seemed accustomed to their lot, living with the adenen-yo, foraging for them, birthing their babies, they grew restive when they sensed other tor-o-dons. It would be a nuisance if any got away. Then they'd have to capture new ones, risking their lives in combat with the huge, fierce males, and they'd have to train them all over again.

To make matters worse, O-lo-a's people didn't seem to be avoiding them.

It began with a simple male bark, just the hunting cry *bite!* echoing in the darkness, then waz-ho-don males were coming out of the bushes all around them. Om-at got to his feet, shouting for Ta-den, panicky. There! Ko-tan, waving his familiar big stick, closely attended by Mu-lot and Dak-at. They could have handled those three, but the others...

There seemed to be many more waz-ho-don males than he remembered, all of them fat and strong. O-lo-a's people had prospered.

"Adenen-yo!" Loud cry in Ta-den's voice, tall shape looming in the lurid, fearful light of dusk, long stick in one hand, killing stone in the other. The adenen-yo had gotten proficient using those stones of late. And killing was what began to happen. Confusing scenes in the fading light, waz-ho-don faces red like sunset clouds, then red with blood, waz-ho-don screaming, waz-ho-don rolling in the dust.

In a little while, Om-at's crooked finger was broken again, pain lancing up his arm, hard, with each beat of his terrified heart, but the waz-ho-don were going down, heads breaking from the impact of his stone. They couldn't be *winning*, but...

He stumbled over a still form, scrambled to his feet, looking down, wondering if it was someone he knew. Id-an! Withered arm broken in two places, head smashed in, eyes open but sightless. Om-at looked around, wild-eyed. There! Ko-tan standing erect, waving his big stick overhead, eyes and teeth flashing in the darkness, small child-shape lying at his feet.

Om-at screamed, "Baby!"

Ko-tan looked at him, grinning, began to bring the stick down. Om-at bounded forward, swinging the stone at Ko-tan's head. He dodged, but that fat belly got in his way, made him slow. Crack. Ko-tan reeled, turned, hitting him with the stick, pain dancing in his chest. Om-at hit him in the head again, then again, and Ko-tan fell down. Om-at kneeled, pounding with the rock twice more, making sure the thick skull was open, contents like exposed nut meat. Om-at reached in and took a handful of Ko-tan's brains, then stood.

Long silence.

In the distance, at the brow of a low hill nearby, Om-at could see O-lo-a and Pan-at-lee standing together, watching him. Slowly, he lifted the bit of Ko-tan to his mouth, took a little bite, chewed, swallowed. On the hill, Pan-at-lee seemed to stagger. She turned then and walked away, disappearing in the darkness. O-lo-a stood and stared for a little while, then she shouted the female orientation cry, echoing around the hills, the way they found each other when separated in the woods. The waz-ho-don males began to pull back, turning and running away into the night. When they were gone, O-lo-a too turned and went away.

Holding Baby in his bloody arms, Om-at took stock of the situation. Id-an, of course, was dead. So were two females and one of the new infants. But Baby was safe and there were six dead waz-ho-don on the ground. Ko-tan and five Lesser Men. Food, he thought. Ko-tan had tasted pretty good. Better, in fact, than a tor-o-don male.

O-lo-a's people left them alone after that, for an ad of summers, the longest span of time a waz-ho-don could clearly reckon, sticking to the lower end of the valley, leaving the adenen-yo a stretch of territory just below the tor-o-don foraging ground. Baby grew fast, in those three summers getting to be as large and strong as a grown male, though anyone could see, just from the size of his feet, that he would grow larger still. In the end, perhaps, as large as a tor-o-don male.

He seemed to like hunting with Ta-den and Om-at, much preferring their company to that of Pan-sat's ad-yo and the wordless tor-o-don females, going out with them often. He was strong and slow like Om-at, imitating his hunting techniques, but learned to speak like Ta-den, whose words could sometimes flow like Pan-sat's in a feminine stream.

Though Om-at was proud of him, Baby was still a very strange-looking adolescent. As a small child, he'd had the same brown, lanugo-covered skin of all waz-ho-don infants, but when he grew older... The

transparently speaks Holt's real thoughts (like the bird in *Siegfried* betraying Mime) about the cruddy story he's got trapped into, and its creator conveys very little real love for the secondary world he's made for us; but we're a hell of a lot closer this time.

Tom Holt could bring tears of joy to the world. Let us say he will learn to breathe inside his books, and do so.

The impulse to like **Warpath** (Tor, \$18.95) almost makes one lie to oneself about the experience of reading it. Tony Daniel, whose first novel this is, has published several stories over the last few years, among them a novella called "Candle" (1991) which presumably serves as a base for the first third of this book. Candle is the name of the planet. Warpath is what the Mississippians Indians, who have lived on this planet for centuries after their discovery in the 14th century Common Era of the mental legerdemain which allows them to traverse the Real World between the stars at FTL velocity and who have only for the last few centuries had to put up with Western Civilization which has only recently learned how to do FTL stuff, go on. Will James is the name of the protagonist, who tells the whole thing to us personally, who never tells us why he's named after a famous writer of the 20th century Common Era, who is in fact a reconstituted radio wave broadcast centuries earlier from Earth in a pre-FTL era attempt to seed the stars, who has lived on Candle for nine years where he runs a newspaper, and who chunters away with the uneasy loquacity of an Alistair Maclean mercenary, but who is in fact anything but the central focus of the action of *Warpath*.

The Indians of Candle go on the warpath in their canoes, which they propel through atmosphere by the same means of locomotion that they use to propel the same canoes between the stars, because the Westpac settlers have taken advantage of a legal claim made by the evil elder sister of a half-human girl in order to gain from the girl the extraction rights to the extremely valuable loosa clay which has the property of being able to encapsulate digital readouts of humans and also of chocalacas, who are the Real World inhabitants who become paternal mascots of selected Indians and who are themselves divided into two factions, the first wishing to reinhabit the Eden of the phenomenal world through human perceptions, and the second wishing to suck humans for the nectar of their pain (not a new concept), the leader of the first faction being the father of the half-human girl, which is why she has extraction rights to the loosa in the first place, and the plot thickens. The girl is a shape-changer. The protagonist is half in love with her. The Indian Chief, with whom

she's thick, is his pal. One of the human factions on Candle (and elsewhere) is composed of religious fanatics, which Daniel calls the Clerisy, apparently in the belief that Coleridge was wrong to invent the term in order to *distinguish* learned men as a class from the clergy as a class; these Clerisy people espouse ecological views, and are otherwise vicious. There are group minds around. There are a number of computer-driven or generated half-minds, which Daniel calls halfsent. They run machines. There's a lot more: a trip to Earth; a battle or two; the defeat of the evil chocalaca; et cetera.

It is all told by the hapless protagonist in a tone of numbing, secretly self-satisfied, breathlessly wordy befuddlement, and drags on for a large number of pages beyond its modest remit. There are enough ideas here for a dozen novels; there is enough novel here for a short story.

Note. There is not much point in attempting to review, in medias res, Tanith Lee's ongoing *Blood Opera* sequence, the first volume of which, *Dark Dance* (1992), I commented on briefly in *Interzone* 59. The second volume, **Personal Darkness** (Little Brown, £14.99), carries on in the same arterial tone, like a lorry with no time for rest stops. There are moments when it is almost as though Lee were pushing herself, at the prow of this juggernaut, outside normal atmosphere, as though she were climbing some Martian peak into some territory not yet discerned by folk; and at these moments the words almost seem to crack into metamorphosis. But not quite, not yet.

The story starts slowly, and only after a hundred pages or so does one realize that it is clearly going to build without cessation until the last moment, somewhere around page 440. After causing great chaos at the end of volume one, Ruth, incestuous child of Rachaela begot upon her by her own unaging father Adamus of the Scarabae, is at loose in the subfusc spite-filled nightmare of suburban 1980s England, and begins to kill people. Rachaela moves with the surviving Scarabae – who may be vampires, but who increasingly resemble some kind of Egyptian undead or gods or aliens from above the timberline of Mars or elsewhere – to a nicer mansion. Malach and Althene, cognate Scarabae from another line, arrive on request to take care of Ruth. Malach – rendered by Lee in a style almost phosphorescently fascinated by his speed-lined kinesia, his antique Weltschmerz, his Kung-Fu-ish latency – soon finds Ruth, and attempts to train her off the wanton kill. His success – or failure – and the various convulsions which ensue, bring the reader little closer to a sense that *Blood Opera* has come close to ending. In the text, the music

is usually the more romantic sort of 20th-century composer, from Rachmanninoff on up. There is quite a bit of sex; some of it – between two human beings, Nobbi Ives and Stella Atkins, in particular – is astonishingly like the best sex one could imagine for oneself: like dying, like supernatural health, like continuing to breathe. We are carried on.

We are hoping Tanith Lee will mount the caldera and teach us breathing there.

(John Clute)

## New Maps of Oz Paul J. McAuley

Nicola Griffith's first novel, **Ammomite** (HarperCollins, £4.99), flies all the banners of traditional sf. It is set on a lost colony world where civilization has dwindled to Iron Age barbarism, and its plot is essentially that of a rite-of-passage, in which the urgent need to resolve two interlinked biological mysteries provides the excuse for long, lovingly detailed travelogues in which the protagonist *learns*. It looks, at first glance, like a surrender to escapism, but it is no such thing. Beneath the banners, it is armed to the teeth for war on convention.

For Griffith's agenda lies not so much in retelling a familiar story; nor is it in the back-history of the lost colony, which is conveniently obscured by a long gap in which interstellar colonies can be founded and lost while on Earth the central character can have held a post at the University of Aberystwyth even though a thousand years are like an evening gone. Nor are the biological puzzles precisely at the heart of the novel, for both are resolved about half-way through.

No, Griffith's real interest is to traverse an imaginary landscape entirely populated by women and then to redeem the journey by showing that it wasn't quite what you thought it was. *Ammonite* is not concerned with deploying tropes, but reinventing them. It is a novel about exploring a world without men, but it is not a novel about a feminist utopia where to remove men is to remove Original Sin. It is less of a world tour than a Long March.

The world is Grenchstom's Planet, or GP, or Jeep, where an endemic virus has winnowed the original colonists free of men. Women survive in Iron Age tribes and settlements (I am trying hard not to use the word *Celtic* here), somehow are able to bear babies which are not clones – alert readers will hardly pause to put two and two together to get at least half the answer straight away – and are mysteriously in harmony with the world's wild climate